

OUCS Fact Sheet

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Tips to Reduce Your Water Bill

Water is one of the few commodities people cannot live without, and it is also a commodity many of us may take for granted. Consumers can easily reduce water usage without sacrifice, by following a few simple steps. These are some of the tips that will not only help protect a critical resource, but can also add up to significant savings on your monthly bill.

Make Sure Your Home or Business is Leak-Free

Leaky faucets, pipes or toilets can waste significant amounts of both water and money. Three simple tests should be performed regularly:

- Check all faucets regularly to make sure they are not leaking or dripping.
 - A faucet that drips once per second and goes un-repaired for a month wastes nearly 260 gallons of water.
 - If the same faucet goes un-repaired for a year, the wasted water will add up to more than 3,100 gallons.
 - Example 1: If a customer is billed at a rate of \$1.75 per 1,000 gallons, a 3,100 gallon leak will add \$5.43 to the customer's bills.
 - Example 2: For the customer who is billed \$7.00 per 1,000 gallons, the same leak would cost \$21.70. (Such a leak would also increase the customer's sewage bill, if it is also calculated on the amount of water used.)
 - A typical home uses approximately 5,000 gallons of water per month.
 - A faucet that drips once every 3 seconds wastes 86 gallons of water per month.
 - Leaky faucets can be fixed inexpensively, with hardware stores, plumbing supply stores and home maintenance books offering equipment and advice.
- Checking toilets for leaks is very easy.
 - Put a few drops of food coloring in the toilet tank and wait 15 to 20 minutes before flushing. If any food coloring shows up in the bowl before you flush, you have a leak.
 - Flush quickly after finishing the test, to keep from staining the bowl.
 - Toilet leaks can waste hundreds of gallons per day if left un-repaired. However, fixing them is usually simple and inexpensive. Consult a home fix-it manual or a hardware store for solutions.
- After checking and fixing any leaking faucets or toilets, do a meter test regularly to ensure that you have no "invisible" water leaks (such as a leak in the buried supply line running to your home or business).
 - Start by shutting off all faucets and turning off all water-using appliances.
 - Read your water meter, and then don't use any water for the next half-hour.
 - After a half-hour, read your meter again. If it has moved, you have a leak.

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In The Bathroom

- Check toilets for leaks on a regular basis (as described above).
- If a toilet is more than 8 years old, it may use thousands of gallons more per year than newer models. Consider either installing a new toilet or placing a “toilet dam” in the tank. If placed properly, a toilet dam can save hundreds of gallons each year.
 - A toilet dam can be a plastic shield (available from a hardware or plumbing supply store) or a homemade device, such as a plastic bottle filled with pebbles. Either way, the point is to take up space in the tank or block off a portion of the tank so that it requires less water.
 - Toilet dams should never interfere with the flushing/plumbing mechanisms, and should be checked regularly to ensure that they do not.
 - A brick, if placed in a toilet tank, can release chemicals into the water that may damage the flushing mechanisms.
- Do not put trash in the toilet. This not only wastes water, but may also cause problems in sewage systems and septic tanks.
- Install a water-efficient showerhead. It will pay for itself in a few months.
- Take showers instead of baths will save significant amounts of water. Also consider taking shorter showers.
 - Any of these actions will not only reduce water bills, but they may also reduce sewer bills along with energy bills related to heating the water.
- Install flow restrictors in faucets.
- Do not leave the faucet running when washing hands, brushing teeth or shaving.

In The Kitchen

- When washing dishes:
 - Run the dishwasher only when it is fully loaded.
 - Use the economy setting on the dishwasher (if it has one).
 - Remember that many newer models of dishwashers offer different cycles, allowing you to use them most efficiently.
 - If a dishwasher is energy-efficient, it is likely to be water-efficient as well.
 - If you wash dishes by hand, fill the basin with soapy water and quickly rinse the dishes under a slowly moving stream from the faucet.
 - Depending on the type of dishwasher you own, hand washing may not necessarily be more efficient.
- Garbage disposals require large amounts of water. Consider composting food or putting it in the garbage, instead.
- If you run the faucet while waiting for water to get hot, consider collecting it in glasses or a pitcher instead of pouring it down the drain. The collected water can be used for other things, such as watering plants, drinking, etc.
- If you want cold water for drinking, keep a pitcher in the refrigerator.
- Do not use running water to thaw meat or other frozen foods. Instead, defrost food in the refrigerator or in your microwave.

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Around The Home or Business

- Insulate your water heater and maintain it regularly, following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Insulate your hot water pipes. If the water stays warm while in the pipes, you will not have to run as much water to get it to the desired temperature.
- Wash only full loads of clothing, set your washing machine to the proper water level and remember that many newer washing machines offer water-efficient features.
- Remember that energy-efficient appliances are likely to be water-efficient, too.
- Look for water-efficient models when considering buying a filtering or water softening system.
- Locate the master shut-off valve in your home or business, and be prepared to use it in case a pipe bursts or another emergency occurs.

Outdoors

- Be efficient when watering the lawn.
 - Water in the early morning or late evening to minimize evaporation.
 - Water only when necessary. (If you walk across the grass and leave footprints, your lawn needs to be watered.)
 - Do not water on windy days, or just after it has rained.
 - Avoid using a sprinkler that sprays a fine mist.
 - Adjust sprinklers so only the lawn is watered and not the building, sidewalk, or street.
 - If you use an underground sprinkler system:
 - Remember to turn it off when it rains (especially if it is on a timer).
 - Maintain your system regularly and check the valves for leaks.
 - Adjust the system to meet seasonal demands.
- When mowing, raise the lawn mower blade to the highest setting. Closely-cut grass makes the roots work harder, requiring more water.
- When washing the car, use soap and water from a bucket. Use a hose with a shut-off nozzle for the final rinse.
- Use a broom to clean off your driveway. If you must use a hose, use one with a high-pressure, on/off nozzle.
- Properly-done landscaping can save water.
 - Plant in the spring or autumn.
 - Check with your local nursery for recommendations trees, shrubs and plants that need less water.
 - Using a layer of mulch around plants can reduce evaporation and promote plant growth.